



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

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Open Letter to SNP Leadership Contenders RE National Care Service

Dear Humza, Kate and Ash,

Congratulations on passing the nominations threshold to be considered for the next leader of the SNP. Over the next month, the Scottish public await your plans for the future of our country with bated breath.

I am therefore writing to highlight the issue I have received more emails and letters from constituents about over the past month than any anything else – the National Care Service (NCS), the Scottish Government's supposed flagship policy for this parliament.

Like many others, I was cautiously optimistic when plans for a NCS were announced. Anyone who interacts with the present system will testify why radical reform is needed. Services are fragmented as for-profit providers dominate the sector. Care staff are poorly paid, with many on precarious contracts. Austerity has left many services decimated at a time when demand is only increasing as our population ages.

Early in this parliament, your predecessor Nicola Sturgeon [compared](#) the setting up of a NCS to the establishment of the NHS in the wake of the Second World War. She also [said she agreed](#) with former Scottish Labour leader Richard Leonard that the profit motive needed to be removed from the sector. This indicated that a comprehensive, publicly owned service, free at the point of use – as my party campaigned for in the 2017 and 2019 general elections – was on its way.

The reality is quite the opposite.

From the outset, the draft legislation introduced last year has been greeted with alarm from all quarters for many reasons:

- Several contracts to design the service have been awarded to multinational consultancies, entirely ignoring input from workers and service users
- Local input to such a service is set to be stripped away entirely and transferred to a new quango bearing the NCS name but, unlike the NHS, not actually employing any staff
- No commitment to national collective bargaining for workers is provided despite this being explicitly recommended in the [2021 Derek Feeley review](#)



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- Most concerningly of all, the principles underpinning the NCS appear to be the opposite of the NHS; this is a National Care *Commissioning* Service, not only keeping profit in the system but expanding the range of services to vulnerable children and adults to be put out to tender
- Shockingly, Section 41 of the Bill even allows councils and Health Boards to be prevented even from bidding to provide the services that they are currently responsible for

Compounded by the lack of clarity over costings and the general lack of detail in the bill itself, it is little surprise that local authorities, charities and trade unions have called for the bill to be paused and for ministers to go back to the drawing board.

It is not too late to change tack. There needs to be a recognition that social care can not be truly reformed in this country without tackling the ownership model and taking on the big care firms. Scottish Labour's consultation into the NCS in 2020 found 84% of those polled opposed all private involvement in Scottish social care and 90% backed greater public control of all social care. The public understand the system is broken.

The private sector's explicit obligation will always primarily be to shareholders, not the needs of residents. These providers are in real financial difficulty on both sides of the border, and hundreds have collapsed or handed back contracts over the past few years. Funds that should be going towards the care of the most vulnerable people in our society are being looted by tax avoiders, with dozens of Scottish care homes [owned by companies based in tax havens](#). These same firms are entirely exempt from Freedom of Information, leaving so many families in the dark when they lost loved ones during the pandemic.

What is needed is nothing less than a radical overhaul of the entire legislation. The net cost of bringing these under public control will be much lower in the long run than the current shamolic system, and it will assure the public that your Scottish Government really is putting the dignity and wellbeing of those who receive care before private profit.

I would appeal to all three of you: if you are elected, **please pause this legislation and come back with proposals for a genuinely not-for-profit NCS**, which takes on board the concerns of workers, service users and their families.

I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

Katy Clark MSP
West Scotland Region